

'Combining growth with equity in an agrarian economy: development in England c.1600-1830'

Dr Simon Szreter (St John's College, University of Cambridge)

Abstract:

This presentation will examine the way in which between 1600 and 1800 a universal social security system evolved in England. The Old Poor Law offered even the poorest in the community effective protection from food scarcity and from personal misfortune. It also contributed to labour mobility and facilitated inter-generational financial independence. The system was created by central government statute, funded by a mandatory local property tax. It was administered locally at the parish level, while the fairness of its operation was monitored by the accessible but impartial, centrally appointed but locally resident justices of the peace (magistrates). It ran in parallel with a parish-based identity registration system established in 1538, which provided the citizenry with legal security for their property ownership as well as ensuring their entitlements to parish social protection. History demonstrates what relatively low income agrarian economies can achieve in combining equitable institutions with growth, provided central and local power is effectively harnessed to this purpose.

Readings:

'Public Health and Security in an Age of Globalizing Economic Growth: the awkward lessons of history', ch.12, in S. Szreter, *Health and wealth. Studies in History and Policy* (New York: University of Rochester Press 2005), 416-47.

'The right of registration: development, identity registration and social security - an historical perspective' *World Development*, Volume 35, Issue 1 (2007), 67-86.

Brief CV:

Simon Szreter, M.A. Ph.D, is Reader in History and Public Policy in the History Faculty, University of Cambridge and Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge.

He is a founding member of the History and Policy Network and co-editor of its electronic journal, www.historyandpolicy.org, a joint initiative of Cambridge University History Faculty, the Institute of Contemporary British History, University of London, and the Centre for History of Public Health in the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

He teaches modern British economic and social history since 1700 and the comparative history of population and development and environment. His main fields of research are demographic and social history, the history of empirical and official social science and the relationship between history, development and contemporary public policy.

His principal publications are:

Fertility, class and gender in Britain 1860-1940 (Cambridge U. Press 1996);
Changing family size in England and Wales 1891-1911: place, class and demography (co-authored, Cambridge U. Press 2001);
Categories and contexts. Anthropological and Historical Studies in Critical Demography (co-edited, Oxford U. Press 2004);
Health and Wealth. Studies in History and Policy (Rochester U.Press 2005).

He has edited special issues of *Social History of Medicine* and the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* and authored numerous articles in leading historical, social science and medical journals, most recently an article on 'The Right to Identity Registration' in *World Development* 2007 and co-author of the 'Who Counts' series of related articles published online in the *Lancet* in October 2007. He is currently working with Dr Kate Fisher of Exeter University on a co-authored book from oral history sources on the history of sexuality and birth control in marriage in mid-twentieth-century Britain.

Recent invited public lectures:

Launch Lecture for London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine's Centre for History in Public Health, 2003
Invited Plenary for Indepth Annual Conference, Hanoi, Vietnam 2004
Invited Public Lecture to Institut for Folkesundhedsvidenskab, Copenhagen, 2005
The Chadwick Lecture, University of Manchester, 2006.
The Colenso Lecture, University of Kwazulu-Natal, Durban, 2007.
The Third Annual Wellcome History of Medicine Lecture, University of Cambridge, 2007.
Keynote Lecture, Gloablization and Society Conference, Rochester University Medical Center, 2008